

The News-Journal

'Machine gun social' gets candidate attention

By Jason Beck
Staff Writer

It was a typical political fundraiser with barbecue, handshakes and a raffle. Then somebody asked a shocking question.

“What would you like to shoot this evening... an MP5 or an UZI?”

And such has been Tim D’Annunzio’s entire run for Congress. From hosting unusual events, such as an indoor skydiving meet, to raising more money than his other Republican opponents combined, the Raeford native has marched to the beat of a different drummer since announcing his intention to run for the 8th District US Congress seat last year. His ‘Machine Gun Social’ last week at a gun range in Fayetteville was the latest newsmaker in a surging campaign that may be tapping into a growing undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the traditional political structure in Washington.

D’Annunzio’s campaign offered supporters a chance to shoot two types of machine guns at the indoor shooting range for \$25 a piece. More than 70 people took advantage of the unusual opportunity.

“We figured people would get a bang out of it,” D’Annunzio said with a laugh. “It’s all a part of what they call creating a buzz. People see me on TV and it’s a fun way to get noticed.

“The second amendment is just like the rest of the constitution,” he said. “This shows my commitment to the second amendment.”

At least two news camera crews and several print journalists were on hand to cover the odd gathering. They were looking for a story on a politician who likes automatic weapons, but D’Annunzio used the spotlight to talk about issues he thinks will get him elected – lower taxes, a stronger military and less government intervention in issues such as health care and education.

“The issues I talk about are not related to a certain race or a certain group,” D’Annunzio said. “Conservative principles are good for everyone. It’s time to fight for conservative values, before the America we love is lost for our future generations.”

Supporter Cassie Cone agrees. She didn’t shoot the weapons because she loves gunfire, but because she supports the cause.

“I just support Tim,” Cone said. “One reason I support Tim is because he’s made it this far and he didn’t do it by backing down.”

“They are going to say we are a bunch of nuts shooting machine guns,” supporter Moira Fescina said. “But none of these people are dangerous. We are all just good conservative people. This is the everyday man. This is what America was built on.”

D’Annunzio’s campaign has taken off like no other Republican’s in the district. Though at least six candidates have announced their intention to run for the office, and Fayetteville’s Lou Huddleston won a recent straw poll at a GOP event, D’Annunzio is the only Republican to have filed for the seat as of this week.

The man most known for opening a wind tunnel in a Hoke County field now has political television advertisements in prime time and billboards all over the area.

In Fayetteville, a blue and yellow electronic billboard announcing Tim for Congress certainly wasn't cheap, but D'Annunzio has the funding.

As of last week, the campaign had more than \$366,000 in cash on hand, more than any other candidate challenging an incumbent for Congress in North Carolina.

Though D'Annunzio has financed much of his campaign himself, there have also been 165 individual donors across the state.

At the end of the year reporting cycle, incumbent Congressman Larry Kissell had only \$317,921 cash on hand, giving D'Annunzio a financial edge.

"I don't know if it says good things or bad things about the system we have, but it's all about name recognition," D'Annunzio said. "It takes money to do it. I've been blessed and I have the money."

However, he says if he wins the May primary, the Republican National Convention should pick up the torch and help with funding. He says recent events, such as the election of Scott Brown in Massachusetts, show a Republican will win the 8th District seat this year.

"Larry Kissell is not going back in 2010," he said. "Republicans will win the seat."